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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 004903

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF
STATE PASS AID
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/2015

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA PIRACY -- JOWHAR-TFG MEMBERS LET CONTRACT
FOR COASTAL SECURITY SERVICES

SUMMARY

1. (C) Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi has confirmed that members of the TFG allied with President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed signed on November 25 a contract with a U.S.-origin company to provide coastal security and training services. The primary goal seems to be the enforcement of Somali sovereignty over its fisheries, but the PM also cited combating piracy as a task for the service provider. The price tag, cited in the press as \$50-55 million, is far beyond the reach of the Jowhar TFG's own resources; PM Gedi stated the funds will come from "foreign donors" but declined to elaborate. END SUMMARY

PRESS REPORTS CONFIRMED

2. (C) TFG Prime Minister Gedi confirmed to Somalia Watcher November 25 press reports regarding his TFG faction's signing of a contract for coastal security services. TFG-Jowhar Minister of Fisheries Hassan Abshir Farah (from President Yusuf's Darood/Majerteen clan, former "Puntland Minister of Water, and TNG Prime Minister) signed on November 25 the marine security contract with Top Cat Marine Security, Inc., a boat design and security firm apparently based in New York, NY. Somali and international press reported a price tag of \$50-55 million for the first phase of a two-year contract. Top Cat is to provide training for a new corps of Somali Coast Guards and special forces to monitor the 2,300-mile coast. The contractor is to create five coastal security bases, and provide communications equipment, high-speed patrol boats, ground transport vehicles and at least two helicopters.

WHO ARE THOSE GUYS?

3. (C) Top Cat Marine Security's rudimentary website gives little indication as to the company's capacity to fulfill a contract for coastal security. The only company executive name cited is that of Peter Casini, who is listed as the leader of the Top Cat Marine Security team and its powerboat designer. The website information seems directed primarily at a boat purchaser market. The site states, "Top Cat offers essential turnkey services, including operational training, inspection, and mechanical and maintenance service. Backed by a core of highly skilled special operations personnel with first hand experience in law enforcement, military, and security experience, Top Cat brings a level of expertise and training to its production and development that is unsurpassed by any of its competitors." The site states that the company provides training in high-speed, emergency response, and patrol boat operations skills; basic maintenance and mechanical operations skills; navigation and handling; and evasive tactics and interdiction. Top Cat's Peter Casini is quoted in the Somali and international press as saying he will provide speedboats that are "the worst nightmare for pirates," and as indicating that his firm will target "a mother ship off the Somali coast that is launching smaller craft to attack commercial vessels."

4. (C) A "Google" Search of "topcat marine" brings up links to web-logs ("blogs") that call into question the company's financial stability, physical address, and legal status. An article in Kenya's Daily Nation newspaper reports that Top Cat Marine Security may have failed to meet its payroll in 2004, citing in turn an article in the Charleston, SC newspaper The Post and Courier dating from the period when Top Cat had been operating in that state. The Post and Courier article also reportedly tied Peter Casini to "a string of failed business ventures and corporate bankruptcies." The Daily Nation newspaper quotes Casini, regarding reports of financial difficulties, as saying that the reports may refer to a different company, calling his firm "Top Cat Design." The article goes on to quote Top Cat Marine Security's VP for public relations, Ms. Maryann Johnson, as stating in response to an email inquiry that "Top Cat remains financially secure and stable, with

contracts around the world with some of the largest defense contractors." She also reportedly referred in the email to Mr. Casini as an employee and not the owner of the company.

IS IT LEGAL?

15. (C) Somali Watcher did not attend the November 25 contract signing, given that it would have been construed as both (a) USG endorsement of the Jowhar faction of the TFG, and (b) USG endorsement of the contract itself. Somalia Watcher met with PM Gedi on 25 November after the contract signing. Gedi confirmed the essentials of the press reports on the contract; declined to specify the funding sources that would pay the hefty sums involved; and admitted that the legal basis of the contract was somewhat shaky. He confirmed that such an arrangement committing government resources would normally require reference to a TFG budget duly approved by the parliament, but that in the absence of either a budget or a sitting parliament, the deal might have some legal problems. He stressed nonetheless that the Jowhar-based members of the TFG are trying to do something about both illegal fishing operations and the rampant piracy in Somalia's economic exclusion area.

16. (C) Somalia Watcher requested that the PM authorize a briefing from the Top Cat officials who had signed the contact with the TFG-Jowhar. Gedi instructed Mohamed Ali Nur "Americo", Finance and Administrative Manager, Liaison Office of the Prime Minister in Nairobi, to make this happen. Somalia Watcher followed up with Nur on November 28, to be told that the Top Cat representatives had left Nairobi the previous night.

COMMENT:

17. (C) The image of a private security firm of U.S. origins engaging in interdiction operations in the Indian Ocean in the near future is somewhat troubling. That said, we cannot imagine how the signing of this contract can have any immediate impact on Somalia's coastal security, unless the high-speed patrol craft Top Cat Marine has promised are already in Somali waters and fully crewed. The considerable "noise in the system" regarding Top Cat's commercial and financial bona fides; the minimal information available on the firm; the lack of clarity as to the source of funding for a very expensive contractual obligation; and the extraordinary risk involved in entering into a commercial venture with the deeply divided TFG, all point to an extremely questionable enterprise with potential impact on USG interests in the Horn of Africa. Lower Shabelle "governor" and Hawiye warlord Sheikh Yusuf Siad "Indha Adde" -- often labeled an Islamist extremist -- is quoted in the Somali press as saying "I warn the USA against interfering in Somali Waters." Post suggests Department seek additional information from both Top Cat Marine and other USG agencies.

END COMMENT.

BELLAMY